

‘Difficult to imitate and impossible to equal’: Byron, Burns, Moore and the Packaging of National Song

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Abstract

In the early 1810s, just before embarking on his *Hebrew Melodies* project, Byron engaged in a correspondence with the Scottish song editor George Thomson (1757–1851). While Byron chose not to engage in Thomson’s commission to write lyrics for his collections of Irish and Welsh songs, Thomson nonetheless published a number of Byron’s extant lyrics across his collections over the succeeding decades. This article traces how this happened, looks at Thomson’s final editorial choices and presentations of Byron’s lyrics, and reflects on the role of Byron as national songster alongside Thomson’s most significant poetic contributor, Robert Burns, and Byron’s great singer/songwriter friend Thomas Moore.¹

Byron’s comment, quoted in the title to this essay, appeared in a letter to the song editor George Thomson (1757–1851) dated 10 September 1813.² When asked to provide Thomson with national song lyrics for his *Select Collection of Original Irish Airs*, Byron protested a lack of confidence in ‘producing anything worthy’. He was capable, he wrote, of writing lyrics, but of an inferior quality that would only serve to ‘disgrace beautiful music’. ‘Burns in your country, and Moore in this’ continued Byron, ‘have shown that even their splendid talents may acquire additional reputation from this exercise of their powers’.³ And he concluded that these competitors were ‘difficult to imitate and impossible to equal’. Consequently, Byron did not accept Thomson’s invitation, but, with the permission of his publisher John Murray, Thomson did present several of Byron’s extant lyrics with musical settings by Beethoven, Haydn and others over the next two decades.

Byron’s notable deference to the prowess of Burns and Moore might be interpreted as naturally respectful, but this genre was not, as Byron pointed out to Thomson, ‘a species of writing which I undervalue’.⁴ Far from lacking lyrical quality, Byron was already fêted for his lyrical skills and achievements.⁵ His reluctance to take up Thomson’s commission lies uncomfortably beside the creative momentum he brought to the *Hebrew Melodies* project, in which he engaged with Jewish composer Isaac Nathan and tenor John Braham just months after Thomson’s initial letter. Indeed, Thomas L. Ashton’s detailed account of the genesis of *Hebrew Melodies* suggests that it was most probably Thomson’s repeated requests that resulted in Byron opening ‘his mind to the idea of composition for music’ and that it was Nathan who was to benefit.⁶ But

the social milieu of the moment deserves attention too. Byron's involvement in the *Hebrew Melodies* project was significantly linked to his connection with his Cambridge friend John Cam Hobhouse (whose chorister singing had so impressed the young Byron) and their mutual friend Douglas Kinnaird, the financial backer for the project. Moreover, this was the period during which Byron's friendship with Thomas Moore grew and there are numerous accounts of evenings eating, drinking, debating, visiting the theatre and singing songs. As Jeffery Vail has noted, the two writers were inseparable during the theatre season of 1813, often spending time at the home of Leigh Hunt, whose musical soirées were famous and where Moore and Byron, in Hunt's view, 'harmonized admirably'.⁷ Vail's work, indeed, makes a convincing case for the lyrical influence of Moore over Byron at this particular moment in Byron's poetic development.

George Thomson's National Song project included major collections of Scottish, Welsh and Irish songs and involved his commissioning of more than thirty men and women writers of this period and a small number of key European composers. His six-volume Scottish collection ran from 1793, soon after he started corresponding with Robert Burns, until the early 1840s. In the intervening years Thomson produced two volumes of Irish songs (1814 and 1816), three of Welsh songs (1809, 1811 and 1817) and a six-volume octavo set incorporating songs from all three nations. There is no doubt that, from the start, Burns was Thomson's key lyricist (as well as a major source of melodic information);⁸ William Smyth (1765–1849), History Professor at Peterhouse College Cambridge, and author of *English Lyrics* (1797), is the only other writer with whom he corresponds on a similar level.

Thomson's editorial policy involved selecting the melodies he wished to include, commissioning his chosen composers to 'arrange' these for voice, piano, violin, 'cello (and sometimes flute) and to send, at the same time, copies of the melodies or descriptions of them to his selected lyricists. Clearly, having big names on board made a significant difference to Thomson's potential sales and gathering such celebrities was also useful in attracting other great artists to his project. The approaches to composers and poets alike were always flattering and informative; Byron was even used as a promotional 'hook' here. In the case of the composer Carl Maria von Weber, who agreed to work for Thomson's 1826 edition of the Scottish folio collection, Thomson discussed the Edinburgh première of Weber's opera *Der Freischütz* in euphoric detail, and then continued his letter as follows:

I beg leave to inform you that I have for many years employed my leisure in collecting and publishing the National Melodies of Scotland, along with verses by our most celebrated lyric Poets, Burns, Scott, Byron &c. My unbounded admiration for your illustrious countrymen, Haydn & others induced me to request them to compose Ritornelles for introducing & concluding each melody, and Accompaniments for the Piano forte, Violin, Flute & Violoncello, to a great number of those Melodies, which they have done most happily. Admiring your genius no less, I am going to intreat that you will have the goodness to contribute your talents also to enrich the Work.⁹

Using Byron in this way belies just how difficult Thomson found it to induce the poet to work for his project. In his 1898 study of Thomson's *magnum opus*, James Cuthbert Hadden gives a brief account of Thomson's correspondence with Byron.¹⁰ Hadden indicates that it should be little surprise that Thomson was unsuccessful in securing Byron as a major contributor. The main body of their correspondence dates from the period July 1812 until the summer of 1815, a time during which, Hadden states, Byron was 'sick both of himself and of poetry' and when he was longing to leave the British Isles.¹¹ This view might be challenged as generalisation. Suffice it to say, during this three-year period Byron published the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (March 1812); engaged in at least two affairs as well as proposing to, marrying, having a daughter with and then separating from Annabella Milbanke; delivered two of his three addresses to the House of Lords (April 1812 and June 1813); published the *Giaour* (June 1813) and both the musical and text-only editions of *Hebrew Melodies* (April and May 1815). It would be the following April before he set out for Belgium, Germany and Switzerland.

By examining Thomson's letter-books alongside letters now held in the National Library of Scotland John Murray Archive in conjunction with Andrew Nicholson's edition of Murray's correspondence with Byron, several layers can be added to the story recounted by Hadden (see Table 1):¹²

Table 1: Thomson-Byron-Murray Correspondence 1812–1831

British Library George Thomson Letter-books (BL Add MS 35267); National Library of Scotland, John Murray Archive (NLS JMA: 43508 and 41188); Murray's correspondence with Byron (ed. Andrew Nicholson, 2007: AN)

Thomson to Byron, 10 July 1812	NLS JMA. 43508 is Thomson's letter of invitation sent to Byron; BL Add MS 35267, ff. 42–43 is Thomson's fair copy
Murray to Byron, 7 September 1812	AN Letter 2, pp. 8–9: Murray notes that he has 'written to Mr Thomson in obedience to your Lordships [<i>sic</i>] wishes'
Thomson to Byron, 22 September 1812	NLS JMA. 43508 is Thomson's letter to Byron; BL Add MS 35267, ff. 51–52 is Thomson's fair copy
Murray to Byron, 28 September 1812	AN Letter 3, pp. 14–15: Enclosing 'a communication from Mr G. Thomson of Edinburgh'; presumably Thomson's letter of 22 September listed above.
Thomson to Murray, 30 November 1812	BL Add MS 35267, f. 62*
Thomson to Murray, 28 January 1813	BL Add MS 35267, ff. 66–69**
Thomson to Murray, 2 September 1813	NLS JMA. 41188 is the letter as sent to Murray; BL Add MS 35267, f. 81 is Thomson's fair copy

Byron to Thomson, 10 September 1813	<i>BLJ</i> , 3, pp. 113–14. Manuscript in Stark Library, University of Texas.
Thomson to Murray, 8 October 1813	NLS JMA. 41188
Murray to Byron, [Dec 1813–Mar 1814?]	AN letter 35, p. 85: Referring to Thomson's letter to Murray of 2 September 1813 about permission to use three of Byron's songs.
Murray to Thomson, 1 March 1815	NLS JMA. 41188
Thomson to Murray, 16 July 1815	NLS JMA. 41188
Thomson to Byron, 24 August 1815	NLS JMA. 43508 is Thomson's letter to Byron; BL Add MS 35267, f. 156 is Thomson's fair copy
Thomson to Murray, 3 June 1825	NLS JMA. 41188
Thomson to Murray, 17 July 1829	NLS JMA. 41188
Thomson to Murray, 24 May 1831	NLS JMA. 41188

* Not in the Murray Archive—fair copy only in Thomson's letter-books. There is a note on this letter stating that a similar letter was sent by Thomson to Murray on 8 January 1813—but no copy of this letter has been found.

** Not in the Murray Archive—fair copy only in Thomson's letter-books.

Hadden explained that Thomson first contacted Byron on 10 July 1812, having been impressed by *Childe Harold*. He sent the letter through Murray, with a copy of his collection, explaining that the national melodies of Scotland, Wales and Ireland have been set by 'the greatest musical professors' and the songs for them written by 'the most distinguished Poets'. He noted that Burns has been his 'chief Poet' and explained that his death had prompted Thomson to seek contributions from other writers including 'Walter Scott and Joanna Baillie'. He continued:

As variety, particularly variety of excellence, is very desirable, I have been anxious to grace my Work with some contributions from all the most eminent lyric Poets living. A few of the Melodies remain yet unprovided for, and, if I could prevail on your Lordship to take three or four of them into favour, and to match them with congenial Verses, I would be the happiest of men.¹³

Byron responded through Murray (though this particular letter is not extant) saying that he would like to be involved and Thomson then sent, again through Murray, a letter of 22 September 1812 with five Irish melodies for Byron to consider. Thomson's account of how to create a national song is one he uses frequently in letters to poets:

Give me chance to mention, that for each Air, it is desirable to have Sixteen lines at least, though I care not how much longer the Songs may be. Let me also suggest that your Lordship should find it proper to introduce any Name, river, lake or mountain, or any local circumstance whatever, it should be taken from the native country of the Melodies.

I know not whether your Lordship happens to read Music, but altho' you do not, it is in the present case of very little or no consequence, because I have mentioned what appears to me the general character of each Air. Yet I am sensible that the true character of some airs is not easily ascertained, and therefore in writing Verses for national Melodies,

much latitude is allowed to the Poet in chusing [*sic*] the subject or character of his song. He is fetter'd only in the measure, which must precisely correspond with the examples; these examples are put down solely as guides to the measure and not from any consideration as to their fitness or unfitness in regard to Subject, which I leave entirely to the good pleasure of the Muse.¹⁴

While Thomson reminded Murray (in November 1812) that he was keen to receive Byron's contribution, it was not until January 1813 (this letter is missing) that Thomson received word that Byron entertained some doubt about his involvement. It is clear from Thomson's response to this letter that Byron had some concerns about being asked to write lyrics to match Irish airs for which his good friend Thomas Moore had already provided texts. He is thus referring to Moore's pivotal role in the Power brothers' *Irish Melodies* series, which had begun to appear in 1807. Thomson's opinion is that other sets of lyrics can be supplied without worry: 'Mr Morre [*sic*] has furnished verses to Power for the very same airs [,] for which the verses of Burns were previously written and printed in my Work. [*sic*] and with this I find no fault'. He continued 'different songs can be perfectly well applied to the same Air, and each give delight to the heavens'. Thomson was convinced, indeed, that Power had taken his cue from him, telling Byron that his 'work was announced to the public to be in preparation several years before Power thought of his Irish airs'.¹⁵ To satisfy Byron, Thomson sent (with his January letter) airs that had not so far appeared in the Power brothers' collection. But nothing was forthcoming. Thomson sadly concluded, in his letter to Murray of 2 September 1813, that he must 'now apply elsewhere'. In the same letter he ventured to clinch a deal with Murray to use some of Byron's already-published lyrics, naming three texts he was keen to include: 'Loch na Garr', 'Oh had thy fate been joined with thine' and 'The kiss, dear maid, thy lip has left'.¹⁶ Byron made contact directly with Thomson on 10 September 1813. This is the letter in which he comments on his inferiority to Burns and Moore and where he claims that, although he has tried to supply Thomson with suitable lyrics, he has been unable to 'satisfy myself'.¹⁷ Murray did give permission for Thomson to print his chosen Byron texts and they duly appeared across his Scottish and Irish collections (see Table 2 below).

In Hadden's account the remaining information about the collaboration with Byron is found in Thomson's letter to the poet of 24 August 1815. By this time Byron had created his lyrics for *Hebrew Melodies* with music by composer Isaac Nathan. Thomson's letter refers to them as being 'diamonds of the first water' and that he has 'not words to express my admiration'.¹⁸ Building on this compliment Thomson tries again to invite Byron to help with the final volume of his *Select Collection of Original Welsh Airs*. Thomson receives no response then or in the future,¹⁹ but the remaining letters in the John Murray Archive illustrate that the connection between Thomson and Murray continued. Even before writing to Byron in August, Thomson had already sent a copy of the first volume of his *Select Collection of Original Irish Airs* to Mrs Murray (16 July 1815), commenting that the delay of about eighteen months in publishing the volume had been because Thomson was holding out for Byron to deliver. Excepting

one letter in February 1816,²⁰ when Thomson once more expresses his disappointment in failing to secure Byron as a contributor, there are three further letters to Murray dating from 1825 to 1831. Thomson sent copies of his octavo collection in 1825 and of the Scottish folio volumes in 1831, as his new edition in that year included some of Byron's songs. While there appear to be no further letters of permission from Murray, Thomson's letter to him of 24 May 1831 does state:

Nothing could be more obliging nor gratifying than the frank manner in which you permitted me to use such songs of Lord Byron as suited my *Melodies*: You will see that I have availed myself of several of them, which I hope one of your young Ladies will sing & play to you at convenience, and not without giving you pleasure from the deep pathos with which they are fill'd.²¹

Though he contacted Byron initially around the time of compiling his first Irish volume, Thomson published only one of Byron's texts in this collection: 'The kiss dear maid thy lip has left' appeared in Volume 2 of 1816 with a setting by Beethoven of a tune that had been 'communicated without a name by a friend'.²² Byron's lyric appeared again some years later in the second volume of Thomson's 1831 folio *Melodies of Scotland*, with an attractive and previously unpublished arrangement of the Irish air 'Gramachree' by Joseph Haydn.²³ After combining songs from Scotland, Ireland and Wales in his 1820s octavo volumes, Thomson was less worried about dropping a few Welsh or Irish songs or melodies into the later Scottish folio volumes.²⁴ Byron's 'The kiss dear maid' did capture the musical imagination and two other contemporary settings exist: the first, interestingly by Isaac Nathan, and a second by theatre composer Jonathan Blewitt (1782–1853) who worked at Drury Lane in the 1820s.²⁵

While 'The kiss dear maid' appeared soon after Thomson's initial invitation to Byron, the other Byron songs did not appear until several years later. Across Thomson's collections seven of Byron's lyrics appeared, listed below in Tables 2 and 3:

Table 2

First line of Byron lyric	Citation in Thomson's Folio Collections
The kiss dear maid thy lip has left	<i>A Select Collection of Original Irish Airs</i> , 1816, II, no. 37, 90 [Beethoven] {and later in <i>Melodies of Scotland</i> , 1831, II, 18} [Haydn]
Oh! Had my fate been join'd with thine	<i>A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs</i> , 1818, V, 214 [Beethoven]
Farewell! If ever fondest prayer	<i>A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs</i> , 1826, V, 226 {also found in <i>Twenty Five Additional Scottish Airs...</i> entered Stationers' Hall 4 January 1827} thereafter as 204 in Vol V of <i>Melodies of Scotland</i> , 1831 [Hummel]
I saw thee weep	<i>A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs</i> , 1826, V, 230 [melody by George Thomson – setting by Hummel] {also found in <i>Twenty Five Additional Scottish Airs</i> , 230}

If sometimes in the haunts of men	<i>Melodies of Scotland</i> (folio), 1831, III, 114 [Haydn]
Bright be the place of thy soul	<i>Melodies of Scotland</i> (folio), 1831, III, 118 [Haydn]
Away, ye gay landscapes!	<i>Volume Sixth of Melodies of Scotland</i> , 1841, 296 {‘Added to this work in 1838’} [Beethoven]

Table 3

First line of Byron Lyric	Citation in Thomson’s Octavo Collection
The kiss dear maid thy lip has left	<i>The Select Melodies of Scotland Interspersed with those of Ireland and Wales [...]</i> , 1822–23, III, 41 [Kozeluch]
I saw thee weep	<i>The Select Melodies of Scotland Interspersed with those of Ireland and Wales [...]</i> , 1822–23, IV, 40 [melody by George Thomson— no composer named (but not the same as folio Hummel setting)]
Away, ye gay landscapes! [Sweet Annie]	<i>Thomson’s Collection of the Songs of Burns [...]</i> <i>United to the Select Melodies of Scotland and of Ireland and Wales [...]</i> 1825, VI, 4–8 [Beethoven]

Thomson’s choices ultimately embraced his favourite Byron works. ‘The kiss dear maid’ and ‘If sometimes in the haunts of men’ were taken from the poems printed alongside Cantos I and II of *Childe Harold* in the numerous editions of 1812 and 1813.²⁶ ‘Farewell! If Ever Fondest Prayer’ had appeared at the end of the 1814 edition of *The Corsair*. The final section of ‘Fugitive Pieces’ published in the *Hours of Idleness* of 1807, had supplied him with two texts: ‘Oh! had my fate been join’d with thine’ and ‘Lachin Y Gair’ or ‘Loch na Garr’.²⁷ ‘Bright be the place of thy soul’ was in the ‘Stanzas to Music’ first published in *The Examiner* on 11 June 1815. This text was set to music the same year by Isaac Nathan and also picked up by composer John Clarke for his *Twelve Vocal Pieces* (1817) to which Walter Scott, James Hogg and Joanna Baillie (all key lyricists in Thomson’s project) had contributed. It’s likely that Thomson knew the song from the Clarke volume, but he may also have found the text in Byron’s *Poems* of 1816. It is not known if Thomson used the early text-only or musical publication of *Hebrew Melodies*, but he did select the lyric beginning ‘I saw thee weep’ for his octavo collection in 1822–23. He then republished the song in his Appendix of *Twenty-Five Additional Scottish Airs* in 1826 and printed it in the 1826 fifth folio volume. This later appearance uses a melody written by Thomson himself with a new musical setting by Johann Nepomuk Hummel. Thomson often supplied alternative lyrics for the same musical setting (his early Scottish volumes frequently presented a lyric in standard English as an alternative to a first text in Scots). In this case Byron’s text appears alongside Burns’s ‘Farewell, dear mistress of my soul’ (better known by its first line ‘Clarinda, Mistress of my soul’) and Sheridan’s ‘I have a silent sorrow here’. Examination of the early

editions that it is likely Thomson consulted reveals that only orthographic changes or slight variants are made to Byron's printed texts. There are two exceptions to this. 'On Parting', beginning 'The kiss, dear maid! Thy lip has left', loses one of its stanzas (stanza 4). Thomson's editorial note explains that the melody he has chosen for the text requires an 8-line stanza and so he needed to remove four lines for it to fit his musical setting. The other exception is his major editing of 'Loch na Garr'.

'Lachin Y Gair', is perhaps the only obvious choice for a national collection like Thomson's. It has drawn particular attention for its Ossianic overtones, though Jerome McGann has indicated that it is actually more closely inspired by Thomas Campbell's 'Exile of Erin' of 1801.²⁸ It is the only overtly Scottish song that Byron wrote and his footnote on its first printing made mention of his own ancestors, the Gordons. Indeed, part of the song's success is that combination of personal connection and love of place. Thomson did not print the text in full. Commenting alongside the lyric that 'The Editor regrets that he has not room for the intermediate stanzas of the noble author', he had in fact intended to publish only the first three verses.²⁹ In the end he published verses 1 and 2 with the final verse—all of them nostalgic verses about the mountain. He makes further changes to the text, but most of these are insubstantive variants such as removing the exclamation marks in the opening line of the first stanza and in l.5 and changing 'round' to 'Around' and 'Though' to 'tho' in l.6. In l.4 Thomson prints 'For still they are sacred to freedom and love'. While he misspells 'Garr' in verse 1, he prints it correctly in verses 2 and 3 and he hyphenates the title within his text, but otherwise this too is faithful to Byron.

Thomson appears to have struggled to make up his mind about the musical setting for Byron's song. As Barry Cooper has already deciphered, the combination of Beethoven's musical setting with Byron's lyric was a typical Thomsonsque mix-up.³⁰ Thomson sent his European composers a brief description of the subject of the song for which he intended their musical setting, but, as lyrics were frequently with a writer at this point in the process, the composer did not see a final text. In this particular case Thomson was intending Beethoven's setting for the Scots song 'Sweet Annie frae the sea beach came'. But he must also have intended to publish it with English verses by William Collins (1721–59) beginning 'To fair Fidele's grassy tomb', for he sent Beethoven a description of the Collins text rather than the Scots song. He referred to it as a 'lamentation on the death of a beautiful girl' intended for the melody titled 'Sweet Annie'.³¹ Beethoven responded by producing a mournful setting of the melody (thought to be by English composer Maurice Greene) in the minor key.³² By the time Thomson decided to print it he had changed his mind about the text and chosen Byron's 'Loch na Garr' instead. Beethoven's setting of 'Sweet Annie' really suits the tenor of Byron's lyric most effectively. There are tonal similarities in the mood of both texts. Annie is lamenting the absence of her lover Jocky, as she struggles to avoid the advances of his older friend Jamie; Byron is lamenting the separation from his favourite place and its familial connections. Cooper rightly comments that Beethoven's arrangement suits well the 'poet's sense of being bereft of his beloved mountain and the land of his

forebears' and he even suggests that the opening of the melody (it rises rather majestically and drops again) 'outlines the shape of a mountain'.³³

Thomson appears to have been pipped at the post in terms of being the first to publish Byron's song with music. As Cooper has identified, another musical setting of the text had appeared just a few months earlier in Robert Archibald Smith's *Scottish [sic] Minstrel*.³⁴ Unlike Thomson, Smith includes all five stanzas of Byron's lyric, with some emendations: 'dear are thy mountains' rather than 'belov'd' in the first stanza; 'As daily I stray'd' not 'strode' in the second; and changing 'dark Loch na Garr' to 'wild' in the last line of verse 4. This appearance uses an unnamed but sweeping and majestic melody that is still commonly sung today. Cooper also mentions a later appearance of Byron's song with this melody in John Greig's *Scots Minstrelsie: A National Monument of Scottish Song* (1893). While Smith's publication gives no additional information about the melody, Grieg states that this triumphant tune was composed by Mrs Partick Gibson (née Isabella Mary Scott), born in Edinburgh in 1786. A lady of literary and musical fame (she was apparently an 'accomplished harpist'), she was believed to be 'distantly related to Sir Walter Scott'.³⁵

But neither Smith nor Thomson were the first to present the song to the musical public, for a single song-sheet exists with an arrangement by London theatre composer Henry Bishop: 'Loch na Garr / A favourite air with an Accompaniment for the / Harp or Piano Forte / Sung by Mrs Mountain / with Unbounded Applause at the / Public & Private Concerts, / Composed by / Henry R. Bishop.' It was printed and sold for the author by L. Lavenue of 26 Bond Street, who was based at this address from 1805. As the text did not appear in print until 1807, the song must have appeared between then and Lavenue's move to no. 28 Bond Street in 1811.³⁶ Bishop is famed for his hit 'Home Sweet Home' and there are some similarities to his tune for 'Loch na Garr', with its triplet semiquavers in the accompaniment, well suited to the harp.³⁷ It's not as striking a melody as those published by Thomson or Smith, and the melancholic mood of Beethoven's arrangement is lost in the Bishop setting. But Bishop's melody, like the others, rises proudly with the first phrase of Byron's text and there are moments of darkness well-suited to the stormy landscape described. Bishop uses only the first three stanzas of Byron's text (which was Thomson's initial plan) and, with the exception of some orthographic changes (removal of exclamation marks in stanza 1 for example), he is faithful to Byron's lyric.

It is sad that Byron failed to respond more positively to Thomson's commission. Alongside the energy he brought to the *Hebrew Melodies* project, such a contribution would allow a more detailed comparison with the significant song corpus of Burns and Moore. Byron's comment on the superiority of these songster poets is, in one sense, understandable. Even allowing for the political stimulus for *Hebrew Melodies*, Byron did not work with song in quite the same ways as either his Irish or Scottish counterparts. The core of song-writing for Burns and Moore was directly connected to major national cultural projects in which the Power brothers, Thomson and James Johnson, amongst others, were playing a central facilitating role. Moreover, both Burns and Moore were

completely bound up with the musical component of song. As well as his prowess as a performer, Moore's activity as a song-writer was inspired by Edward Bunting's transcriptions of Irish melodies gathered at the Belfast Harp Festival in 1782.³⁸ Indeed, the success of the Power's publishing project resulted in Moore's lyrical texts becoming known as 'melodies'. Burns, as he noted in his letter to Thomson of September 1793, began with a melody. Without the mood, tone, structure and rhythm of a tune, he was unable to begin to write a lyric to match.³⁹ The creation of lyrics for *Hebrew Melodies* did involve intense (if short-lived) collaboration between Byron and Nathan, but the details of that working relationship are not fully explained by poet or composer.⁴⁰ Byron, especially in the early 1810s, was surrounded by performances of poetry in the theatre and in the drawing room and was deeply affected (as were so many) by Moore's powerful performances of his own songs. But there is no evidence to suggest that melody played the same role in Byron's creative process. Arguably, Byron's prowess as a lyricist is best displayed within larger poetic narrative frameworks.

Tom Mole's exploration of *Hebrew Melodies* offers another perspective on Byron's song-writing.⁴¹ Mole argues that Byron's wish to deviate from and experiment with a new form and new ideas caused Murray considerable challenges in branding his key poet at this moment in his career. Certainly, Murray's letter to Thomson of 1 March 1815, but a month before Nathan's musical publication of *Hebrew Melodies*, notes his frustration. Interestingly Murray clearly saw benefits in Byron's involvement with a British collection like Thomson's in preference to his chosen collaboration with his Jewish peers Nathan and Braham:

I am more grieved that [*sic*] you imagine at the omission of one great writer amongst them—where he had far better appeared than in some Stupid Hebrew Melodies to which as a sort of Charity Lord Kinnairds brother induced him to write no less than 12 exquisite poems—I have not the most distant connexion with the publication & although I am now publishing a compleat collection of Lord B's Works—They will not be contained in them.⁴²

But they were. Murray's business acumen told him that inclusion or 'containment', as Mole calls it, was the best option here, and the texts of *Hebrew Melodies* appeared quickly in his four-volume collected edition of Byron. Murray's removal of the texts from their musical context at this point was pivotal in terms of Byron's role as a song writer. The separation of these songs from their musical environment caused untold problems with sales of the recently published musical settings and the ensuing unpleasantness with both Nathan and Braham may well have deterred Byron from further dealings with songs for performance. That said, Byron's personal circumstances were to change dramatically and almost simultaneously as he set sail for the continent. Had he stayed, would he have ventured further into the world of national and domestic song culture? Certainly, comparable opportunities seem not to have presented themselves in quite the same way thereafter.

For whatever reasons, Byron stepped away from song-writing for singing. But the musical lives of his texts, as shown so convincingly by Gooch and Thatcher,

continued.⁴³ As the nineteenth century progressed, the number of musical settings of Byron's work exceeded those of any other Romantic writer except Robert Burns. Thomson's collections with their musical settings by Haydn, Beethoven, Hummel and others became quickly outdated by the new and more sensational music of Rossini and his contemporaries. However, it is notable that Thomson's initial choice of key Byron texts for singing didn't become outmoded. Rather, it was this group of Byron songs that continued to be published with music and sung across the century.

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- 1 The key research for this paper was undertaken within the remit of the AHRC-funded 'Editing Robert Burns for the 21st Century' project based at the University of Glasgow.
- 2 *BLJ*, 3, pp. 113–14.
- 3 Ibid. Marchand's note to the letter states that Thomson had published Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies* in 1807. This is erroneous. Moore's *Melodies* were published by J. and W. Power in London in that year. It is notable that Byron refers to Moore as being of 'this country', namely England, when his contribution is to Irish National song culture.
- 4 Ibid., p. 114.
- 5 Jerome McGann notes that 'Although academic criticism in the twentieth century has maintained a studied disinterest in Byron's lyric poetry, nineteenth-century attitudes were (as usual) very different'. McGann, *Byron and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 93.
- 6 Thomas L. Ashton, *Byron's Hebrew Melodies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 19–20.
- 7 See Jeffery W. Vail, *The Literary Relationship of Lord Byron & Thomas Moore* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 5. Vail quotes from *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, ed. by J.E. Morpurgo (London: Cresset Press, 1949), p. 315. Chapter three of Vail's study concentrates on the writers' engagement with 'Nationalism, Music, and Poetry', pp. 81–102.
- 8 Burns's letters to and from Thomson had appeared as volume 4 of James Currie's pivotal *Life and Works of Robert Burns* in 1800. The manuscript of Burns's side of the correspondence is located as the Dalhousie manuscript at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, but Thomson's manuscript letters have disappeared. Currie's edition provided both sets of letters as edited by himself and Thomson.
- 9 Letter from Thomson to Weber of 18 January 1825: BL Add MS 35268/137–39.
- 10 James Cuthbert Hadden, *George Thomson The Friend of Burns* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1898). The section on Byron is at pp. 187–93.
- 11 Ibid., p. 187.
- 12 See *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, ed. by Andrew Nicholson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007).
- 13 Letter from Thomson to Byron (via John Murray) of 10 July 1812: NLS, John Murray Archive [JMA]—MS 43508. Fair copy of this letter is in Thomson's letter-books at the British Library: BL Add MS 35267, ff. 42–43.
- 14 Letter from Thomson to Byron, via John Murray: NLS JMA, MS 43508. No melodies or examples are included in this letter, but they are listed in Thomson's letter-books: BL Add MS 35267, ff. 51–2 (f. 52r). The five airs were: 'Dermot & Sheila', 'Kitty of Colraine', 'The legacy', 'Avenging and Bright' and 'The Brown Maid'.
- 15 Leith Davis also believes this to be the case: see Leith Davis, *Music, Postcolonialism and Gender: The Construction of Irish National Identity, 1724–1874* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006),

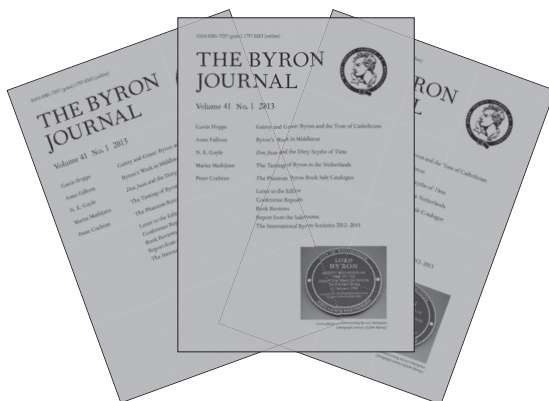
- pp. 141–42. Quotations here are from Thomson's fair copy of his letter to Murray dated 28 January 1813; BL Add MS 35267, ff. 66–69.
- 16 Letter from Thomson to Murray of 2 September 1813; NLS, John Murray Archive, MS 41188. Fair copy of this letter: BL Add MS 35267, f. 81.
- 17 Letter from Byron to Thomson of 10 September 1813, in *BLJ*, 3, pp. 113–14.
- 18 NLS JMA MS 43508 is the original letter. Thomson spells the poet's name 'Biron' on the address.
- 19 Letter from Thomson to Byron of 24 August 1815; BL Add MS 35267, f. 156. See Hadden, p. 193.
- 20 Letter from Thomson to Murray of 14 February 1816; NLS JMA MS 41188.
- 21 See letter from Thomson to Murray of 24 May 1831; NLS JMA MS 41188.
- 22 This was the term printed alongside the song in Thomson's volume: *A Select Collection of Original Irish Airs*, 2.37 (1816), p. 90.
- 23 Haydn had died in 1809 but this was one of several of his settings Thomson published posthumously. An alternative text by R.B. Sheridan beginning 'Had I a heart for falsehood framed' was given alongside Byron's lyric.
- 24 Irish airs were often regarded as a part of Scottish tradition and were found in collections of Scottish song and fiddle tunes in the long eighteenth century. Burns mentions Irish tunes several times in his letters to Thomson: see *The Letters of Robert Burns* ed. by G. Ross Roy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). See, for example, Burns's letters to Thomson in September 1793 (Letter 586), 2, p. 243 and (Letter 589), 2, p. 252; or in November 1794 (Letter 646), 2, p. 326; and in May 1795 (Letter 664), 2, p. 350.
- 25 See also his setting of James Hogg's 'Niddity Noddity Nanie' (better known as 'Auld Joe Nicholson's Bonny Nannie') in James Hogg, *Contributions to Musical Collections & Miscellaneous Songs*, ed. by Kirsteen McCue (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 561–67.
- 26 See above in NLS published 1812 [GB. 1246] includes *Childe Harold* Cantos 1 and 2 and some poems following these. 'On Parting' ('The kiss dear maid') appears on pp. 190–91, but 'If sometimes in the haunts of men' does not appear in this first edition. It seems to have been added in the second edition as noted by McGann. See *CPW*, 3, p. 392. The text beginning 'If sometimes in the haunts of men' is no. 183.
- 27 *Hours of Idleness, A Series of Poems Original and Translated by George Gordon, Lord Byron, A Minor* (London: Murray, 1807). 'Oh! Had my fate' appears on pp. 184–87 with 'Lachin Y Gair' on pp. 129–32.
- 28 See *CPW*, 1, pp. 103–04. This text appears in *Hours of Idleness* of 1807 on pp. 129–32.
- 29 See Thomson's letter to Murray of 2 September 1813.
- 30 Barry Cooper, *Beethoven's Folksong Settings: Chronology, Sources, Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 80, 89. Cooper also discusses Byron on p. 70.
- 31 This is an often-anthologised and typically funeral lyric with much natural imagery and a certain gothic charm to it.
- 32 The melody was thought to have been composed by 'Dr Greene', namely the English composer Maurice Greene and it was selected by Joseph Ritson for his pivotal *Scottish Songs* of 1794. It also appeared in the first volume of James Johnson's (and Robert Burns's) *Scots Musical Museum* in 1788 (no. 84). Murray Pittock's recent work on the song notes much earlier appearances from 1730s onwards and that it is also in David Herd's collection which is probably how Burns came to know it. See *The Scots Musical Museum*, ed. by Murray Pittock for the new Oxford Works of Robert Burns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming, 2018). While the text is in rich Scots the melody's English source caused William Stenhouse to note that this song was 'deservedly a great favourite on both sides the Tweed'. See: *Illustrations on the Lyric Poetry and Music of Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1853), pp. 87–89.
- 33 Cooper, p. 91.
- 34 R.A. Smith, *The Scottish Minstrel A Selection from the Vocal Melodies of Scotland Ancient and Modern Arranged for the Piano Forte by R. A. Smith*, 6 vols (Edinburgh: Robert Purdie, 1824) 6, pp. 38–39.
- 35 *Scots Minstrelsie. A National Monument of Scottish Song*, edited and arranged by John Greig,

Byron, Burns, Moore and the Packaging of National Song

- 6 vols (Edinburgh: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1893), 5, pp. 177–79. Greig’s note cross-refers to R.A. Smith’s collection and first appearance of the melody. Mrs Gibson died in 1838.
- 36 See Charles Humphries & William C. Smith, *Music Publishing in the British Isles* (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd, 1954), p. 206.
- 37 See Richard Northcott, *The Life of Sir Henry Bishop* (London: The Press Printers Ltd., 1920). This is, to date, the only major study of Bishop and his work. Specific discussion of ‘Home Sweet Home’ can be found at pp. 74–78. General information for Bishop is found in Clive Brown’s article on Sir Henry Rowley Bishop (1786–1855) for the online *ODNB* and Nicholas Temperley’s updated 2013 entry for Sir Henry R. Bishop for the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* now part of *Oxford Music Online*.
- 38 See Davis, *Music, Postcolonialism and Gender*, p. 95.
- 39 *The Letters of Robert Burns*, 2, pp. 239–48 (letter 586).
- 40 See *A Selection of Hebrew Melodies, Ancient and Modern*, by Isaac Nathan and Lord Byron, ed. by Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (Tuscaloosa & London: The University of Alabama Press, 1988), p. 8. The editors note that ‘Nathan set poems he had been given and brought them to Byron, along with other tunes he had transcribed’. They suggest that composer played and poet listened, and that both created new music and new text as part of this process.
- 41 See Tom Mole, *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), chapter 6, pp. 98–114.
- 42 Quoted from *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, p. 126. This quotation forms a footnote to Letter 65 of [Wednesday] 11 January 1815 from Murray to Byron relating to Mr Kinnaird and permission for Murray to publish *Hebrew Melodies*.
- 43 See Bryan N.S. Gooch and David S. Thatcher, *Musical Settings of British Romantic Literature*, 2 vols (Garland publishing: New York & London, 1982), 1. Byron’s entries are listed on pp. 481–600.

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